

Scotland Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC) Meeting
Wednesday the 10th of November 2021, Held Virtually

Present: Laura Cox, Vice Chair (LC), Don Young (DY), Alan Hamilton (AH), Mark Logie (ML), Mike McCourt (MMcC), Megan Brackley (MB), Andrew Ward (AW), Sandy Reid (SR), Paul Cleugh (PC), Kate Thomas (KT), Ally Gemmal (AG), Jim Wilson (JW), Iain Findlay (IF).

Apologies: David Page, Chair (DP), Huw Sherrard, Secretary (HS).

Absent: Caroline Robertson (CR), Bill Lindsay (BL), Donald Prentice (DP), Richard Anderson (RA), Jock Drysdale (JD).

1) Approval of Last Meeting's Minutes.

The committee's minutes from the last meeting were agreed upon without any comments.

2) Update from UK Chairs meeting with Leo Doherty, Minister for Defence People and Veterans, and VAPC Terms of Reference (accompanied by a written brief from DP).

The committee discussed the paper written by DP after his meeting with the Minister for Defence People and Veterans (MinDPV). Agreed that ML would feed back further on it later.

DY considered it a good step forward, but needed to be recognised in statutory form and the ToR's definitely need to be approved and finalised by MinDPV.

AW expressed that it did not feel like the Ministry of Defence knows who is doing what in the veterans space.

JW assessed developments as a good improvement, and that there is a role for all the different organisations in the veterans sphere. However, they perceived gaps: no mention of the crossover with the Royal British Legion (other third sector organisations working in the veterans sphere). Statutory confirmation of the VAPCs' role should be imperative. JW also agreed that the ToRs needed to be approved and a final draft given approval by MinDPV.

3) Firm Base and VAPCs.

The VAPC discussed the concept of all members attending Covenant/Firm Base meetings across Scotland. This was universally supported. No members were currently attending any except JW, in their role in relation to Veterans Scotland.

ML suggested that members be formally introduced to the CE or AF Champion, perhaps via an official email from DP. The Committee agreed in principle, but LC suggested that DP might want to wait for the final ToRs prior, and this could involve some considerable delay. The upcoming local elections in May 2022 were also recognised as a factor to consider, as elected representatives may change imminently - and as most Armed Forces Champions are councillors this may be significant. The potential for a local authority officer to take some role to maintain continuity was discussed - implemented in some areas, but not the case in all. The potential for DP to raise this point in meeting with Keith Brown MSP was raised.

It was also mentioned that if committee members attended these meetings, it should be in a listening capacity - i.e. listening for challenges the Armed Forces Community are facing so these could be fed back up. If members were to contribute then it should be from a UK government perspective, or an update on what is going on at that level, only.

JW reminded the committee that their staff keep the Veterans Scotland information booklet up to date, and all local authority's AF Champions were listed there - as well as the military points of contact in case the AF Champion were unresponsive.

LC proposed that they should send out a list of all local authorities, and members should begin assigning themselves to those they would be able to involve themselves with. The formal approval from DP before beginning was agreed to, though the benefits of initiating prior to the planned face to face meeting in March were discussed. LC agreed to send out the list of local authorities prior to the next meeting.

4) Future Meeting Frequency.

The committee discussed a proposal to schedule meetings once per alternate month, which was agreed to unanimously.

Secondly, the committee discussed a proposal to schedule face to face meetings twice per year, which was also agreed to unanimously. The benefits of this proposal were outlined in the capacity to better build relationships and networks. The committee agreed to schedule the first face to face meeting in March, as well as inviting representatives from various stakeholders to attend it. Edinburgh or Glasgow was agreed as likely the most suitable location. Whether the location of such meetings should alternate between East and West Scotland was raised. It was agreed DP and LC were to organise the above.

5) Future Meeting Cabinet Secretary for Justice & Veterans (CSJ) Keith Brown.

The committee was asked to email DP with any subjects that they considered important to be discussed during this upcoming meeting, which was agreed to.

6) Any Other Business.

The MOD's Armed Forces Covenant meeting on 13th December was mentioned. LC stated that they thought it was a good opportunity for the committee to ensure that MOD civil servants understood the challenges for members of the Armed Forces Community who settle in Scotland. AW, ML, MB, JW, and LC all volunteered to attend, and LC agreed to send on the invite to the meeting to them.

The committee discussed a paper from the Scottish Veterans Care Network (SVCN). KT said she would like to attend the SVCN's bi-annual meeting on behalf of the committee, being a member of the health sub-group and being specialised in that area. LC agreed to introduce KT and Dr Abraham the clinical lead.

IF brought up their investigation of GP referrals. They had initially thought that the AF Veteran box which is available for a GP to select when seeing a patient is only for data collection purposes. It does not mean the veteran gets priority treatment. There was some discussion among the committee as to whether veterans should, and IF pointed to studies from Gulf War veterans which show this cohort suffer more illness and shorter life span.

MMcC joined the meeting, as technical issues had made them unable to attend prior. They explained their involvement in helping an individual who was seeking to challenge their war pension, and some of the pitfalls for veterans. MMcC said this individual was in touch with the

various charities and with Veterans UK, but some difficulties had developed. However, the individual was in contact with the right organisations to support them.

With no further business, LC drew the meeting to a close.

Signed as true on 12/01/22 by David Page, Chair:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Page', written in a cursive style.